

Waste facility draws approval

By ROGER COHEN
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SOUTH AMBOY—A county waste management official has said that he was "surprised... by the adequacy" of a South Amboy chemical and sludge disposal operation that came in for criticism at a recent City Council meeting.

Leonard Hilsen, chairman of the Middlesex County Solid Waste Management Program's Citizen Advisory Committee, said in a letter to Councilman-at-Large J. Thomas Cross that he recently toured the local operation of the Modern Transportation Co. which uses a World War II "Liberty Ship" and a barge docked at the city's piers to store industrial and human waste before transferring it into deep-sea barges for ocean dumping.

Hilsen said in his Aug. 2 letter to Cross that he made the unannounced tour of Modern Transportation's South Amboy facility and met with company Executive Manager Richard Miele and Vice President Richard Albers as part of his agency's own studies to find an alternative to Edison's controversial Kin-Buc landfill for industrial waste disposal.

Hilsen also noted that he toured Modern's more elaborate industrial waste treatment plant in South Kearny for which he also expressed a high regard.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the candor of both men as well as the adequacy of their facilities," the waste disposal advisor told Cross.

Hilsen was requested to comment upon the operation by Cross who described Modern as "a good neighbor" in the city — that has been the subject of some criticism by people who really know nothing about the industry."

At the council session of July 20, Councilman Kenneth Rogers charged that the company's one-time naval ship, supposedly used for storage of non-flammable industrial waste from some 20 New Jersey manufacturers, and its sludge-holding barge are "unseaworthy."

Rogers also said that the operation, whose storage vessels are docked near the former Pennsylvania Railroad deep-water coal piers, "looks like a junkyard."

The councilman went on to question whether Modern was properly licensed, said he suspected that toxic chemicals are being stored in the liberty ship and demanded an investigation by the State Department or Environmental Protection Dept.

said. "I saw nothing objectionable. Of course, that doesn't mean there isn't anything objectionable there — this is an on-going operation."

He said that Rogers' comments concerning the vessels' seaworthiness were irrelevant because "they are just storage tanks (and) aren't used for ocean transport."

Hilsen confirmed the councilman's suspicion that the naval ship stores chemicals but said the facility's "safeguard systems are good if nothing outstanding."

He pointed out that the terms "industrial waste" and "chemicals" are virtually synonymous. "The connotation is not a good one," Hilsen admitted. "But Modern makes no attempt to hide the fact."

He added that the company's records are well-kept and corroborated assertions by both Cross and city health officer David Papi that its permits to operate seemed to be in order.

"If I were an EPA (Federal Environmental Protection Agency) inspector, I'd be quite satisfied," Hilsen declared.

Papi also made a recent inspection of Modern's facility during which he found "some spillage" of sludge around the dock area but found no leakage from the storage vessels.

On Rogers' complaints concerning the alleged messiness of the operation, Hilsen said he spotted no junk or garbage and the maintenance appeared normal for a facility of its type.

"It's no yacht basin," he said. "But that's not unusual."

The county official took note of a waste management bill recently approved by the Legislature and now awaiting the governor's signature that would ban the disposal of toxic chemical waste within 1,000 yards of a waterway.

But he added his belief based on a preliminary examination of the proposed restriction that Modern's South Amboy facility would not be closed as a result because it is a storage operation and thus represents an intermediate stage in the waste disposal process.

Hilsen added his own opinion that bargeing operations such as Modern's will also soon fall under new state regulations and possibly prohibition.

In any case, the EPA, in response to this summer's Long Island sludge attack and the massive fishkill in New Jersey's coastal waters, has ordered a halt to all ocean dumping by 1981 so Modern's days in South Amboy are numbered.

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According to Hilsen, Modern's South Kearny treatment plant, in which acids and caustics are neutralized before being disposed, represents one alternative to the present methods.

He termed Modern Transportation's executives as "realists who are aware that ocean dumping will shortly come to an end and are preparing alternatives."

To Hilsen, it is "heartening" that instead of complaining about environmental protection regulations, the company is "trying to keep up with the times."

Rogers was asked to respond to Hilsen's observations, but chose not to do so "at the present time."

Hilsen stressed that it was "coincidental" that he had inspected Modern's facilities just prior to Cross' request for his evaluation and, in a telephone interview last week, added that he was wary of becoming embroiled in a political dispute between Cross, the Democratic mayoral nominee, and Rogers, an independent publican seeking reelection to his first council seat.

Hilsen said the county official, who also serves as health officer in East Brunswick, that he welcomed any public discussion of the "waste disposal question" and "many of Rogers' allegations" of "no unusual smell and the facility in pretty good condition," Hilsen

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